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LCPI WORK AT LAKE CHAMPLAIN, 1986

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INTRODUCTION

With a maximum depth of 400 feet, the 109-mile-long Lake Champlain is a formidable laboratory for individuals and groups conducting field operations into the supposed Loch Ness-like animals known collectively as "Champ." After years of research and on-site exploring, the Champ phenomenon remains unresolved, but ongoing research and fieldwork has uncovered more data for cryptozoologists to study. This report serves as an update on our ongoing fieldwork (see Joseph Zarzynski, 1985, LCPI Work at Lake Champlain, 1985, *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 4: 69–73).

The 31 days that the Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation (LCPI) conducted research and fieldwork during 1986 were directed at: (1) daylight surface surveillance by personnel using cameras and binoculars/telescope from boat and shore-based sites; (2) use of a night-scope for nocturnal surveillance; (3) underwater searches utilizing sonar deployed from boat and scuba monitoring/underwater photography; (4) further documentation, analysis, and publication of Champ sightings; (5) encouraging residents and visitors at Lake Champlain to carry cameras for possible photographic documentation; (6) lobbying to get the Vermont Senate to adopt the "Champ Resolution"; and (7) providing assistance to serious individuals and groups involved in Champ-related research.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The LCPI's 31 days of fieldwork at Lake Champlain were undertaken primarily by Mary Patram Meaney and Joseph W. Zarzynski. Assistance was also provided by Ted Straiton (June 1, 22, August 2–4, September 27–28), Scott Hill and Jim Kennard (July 19), Marian Zarzynski and Liz Meaney (August 25–27), Don Mayland (August 31), Ken Bartowski (September 27), and John Becker (September 27–28). Richard Smith also deserves recognition for his advice and suggestions in fieldwork techniques, and in uncovering some unreported Champ sightings.

The summer, 1986, field activity was marred by poor weather. The Champlain Valley experienced the third wettest summer in the past thirty years. Fieldwork consisted of: daytime surface surveillance from boat and shore using 35 mm cameras, a Super 8 mm camera, telephoto lenses, camera tripods, and binoculars/telescope; nocturnal surface surveillance using a handheld night-scope; boat-deployed sonar (Raytheon DE725C); scuba monitoring; and scuba diver underwater still and video photography.

Lake surface surveillance was conducted primarily from: Kimball Dock Pier, Vermont; Button Bay, Vermont; and Town House Bay, Vermont. Numerous surface surveillance sessions from boats were also carried out.

Five Champ fieldwork-related scuba dives were made as part of an underwater reconnaissance survey. Three of these scuba dives were made by Meaney and Zarzynski; one by Hill, Kennard, Meaney, and Zarzynski; and one by Mayland, Meaney, and Zarzynski.

The dates of the 31 days of 1986 LCPI fieldwork were: April 26; June 1, 22, 28–30; July 1–5, 19; August 2–16, 22, 31; September 27–28. Daytime surface surveillance from shore sites using cameras and binoculars/telescope was conducted during all 31 days; boat surface surveillance using cameras and binoculars/telescope during 18 days; nocturnal surface surveillance from shore using a night-sight scope during three nights; boat-deployed sonar usage during eight days; and five daytime scuba dives (one dive using an underwater still camera, and one dive using an underwater video camera).

Results

LCPI field sessions did not result in any visual sightings or any sonar contacts of an unidentified animal. Nevertheless, success was met in the Vermont Legislature. On April 29, 1986, the Vermont Senate finally adopted the "Champ Resolution" which had been sponsored by the Vermont Senate's Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. The resolution had already been adopted in the Vermont House of Representatives (1982), the New York Senate (1982), and the New York Assembly (1983). The Resolution recognizes "the possible existence of the animal commonly known as 'Champ,' " calls for its protection, encourages further scientific inquiry into the Champ phenomenon, and encourages citizens of Vermont and visitors to report Champ sightings.

The LCPI was able to acquire documentation on 11 Champ sightings reportedly made in 1986 (Fig. 1). A brief listing of these sightings appears below in chronological order:

- —April 11, 1986: Allen Matton and Greg Thacker; Plattsburgh Bay, New York; 6:00 p.m.; range 300–400 yards; near glass-smooth lake surface; animal's neck four feet out of water; width of neck 6–8 inches; animal dark in color; Matton said it "looked like a dinosaur you would see in a book or T.V."
- —May 27, 1986: Christine Hebert; mouth of Winooski River, north of Burlington, Vermont; 3:00 a.m.; barking dog awakened Hebert, who saw animal swimming by her boat ramp as it was illuminated by an outside house lamp; green in color, and muddy; reminded her of a "dinosaur"; observed again two other times that same night as Hebert was awakened by barking dog.

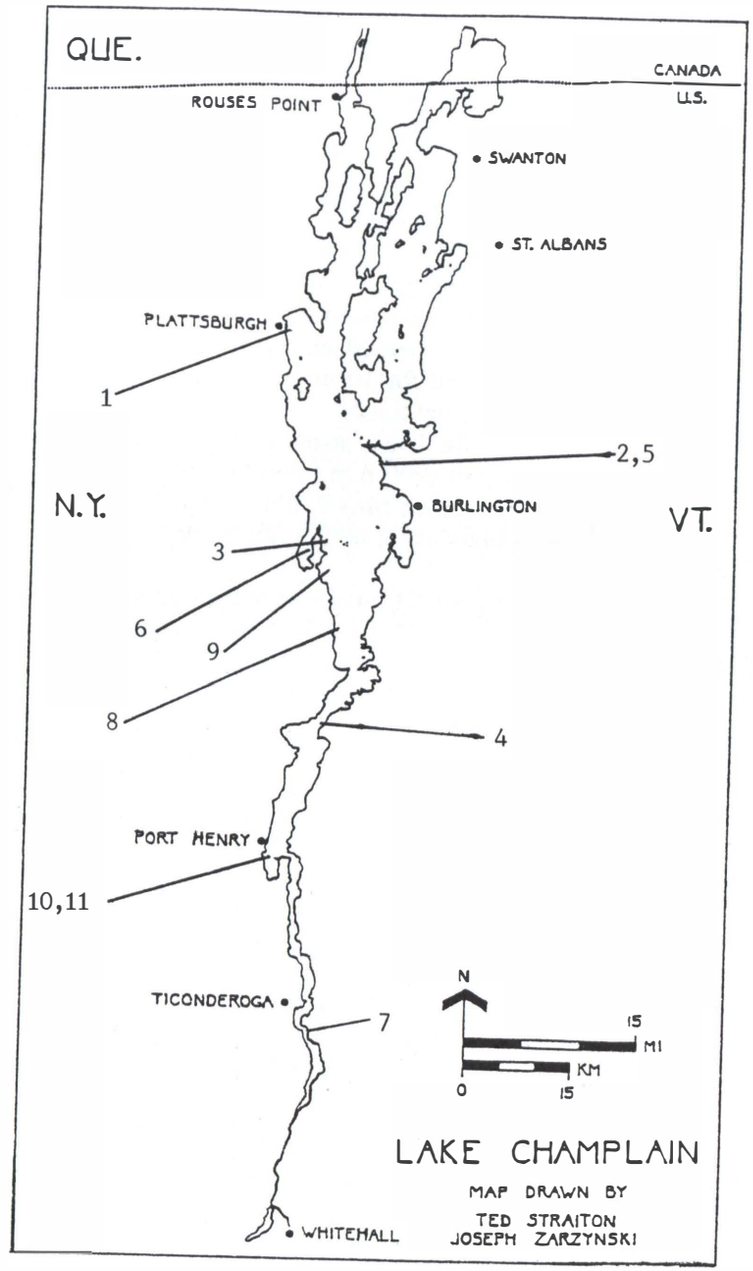

FIG. 1.—Map of Lake Champlain, with numbers indicating the locations of the 11 eyewitness sightings logged by LCPI during 1986.

—June 2, 1986: Scott Gifford and mother; east shore of Willsboro Point, New York, towards Four Brothers Islands; 8:34 p.m.; lake calm as glass; animal "looked about 30 feet long"; grey-brown in color.

—June 16, 1986: Mrs. William Kennedy, Mrs. Dorothy Hagood, and Mrs. Thomas Mathers; Basin Harbor, Vermont; 7:30 a.m.; lake "like a sea of glass"; animal 50 yards offshore; "it looked like a dark round object moving along at the front of the wake," wrote Mrs. Kennedy; "there was a slight hump part way back. There were no boats in the water, or was there any person swimming."

—July 1, 1986: Christine Hebert and mother; same location as above May 27, 1986, sighting; animal observed at night; barking dog awakened Hebert and mother; observed for 10 minutes; range 50 feet; same description as May 27, 1986, sighting.

—July 4, 1986: Lee Tucker, wife, wife's sister, and wife's father; Willsboro Bay, New York; about 2:30–3:00 p.m.; two humps observed offshore; notches on humps; animal dark brown, almost black in color; Tucker observed animal using binoculars; he did not think he observed one or several sturgeon.

—July 6, 1986: John Holt-Harris III, his mother, and father; Buoy 39 Marina, near Ticonderoga, New York; 10:30 a.m.; animal 20 feet long; grayish in color; back hump observed at a range of 50 yards.

—July 7, 1986: Al Trost; north of Essex, New York; 7:30 p.m.; Trost walking dog along lake; he reported seeing an unidentified swimming object at a range of 1,000 feet on quiet waters; animal moved at a speed of up to 10–15 m.p.h. in water; sighting lasted about 30 minutes.

—July 16, 1986: Mrs. Kimball Prince and Anne P. Marsh; near Point Elizabeth, Willsboro, New York; 6:15 p.m.; 15-foot-long, dark hump.

—July 27, 1986: Several people; Port Henry, New York; 7:30 p.m.; animal seen at Bulwagga Bay.

—August 3, 1986: Brenda Baker and several others; Port Henry Beach Dock, Port Henry, New York; 4:45 p.m.; ". . . a long, black, snake-like thing rose to the surface of the water," said Baker; animal appeared near a water-skier floating on the water awaiting the tow boat to return; approximately 25–30 feet long, and about 1½ feet high.

Future Plans

The LCPI will continue its research and field operations at Lake Champlain using a similar strategy to that conducted over the past several years. However, increased emphasis will be placed on subsurface search efforts in the hopes of discovering a Champ carcass, which would constitute irrefutable proof of Champ's existence.